

MEDIA RELEASE

RE is important and should reflect UK beliefs and backgrounds, say UK adults

Research reveals British attitudes towards learning about religion and worldviews

Nearly two thirds (64%) of the UK adult population think that RE is an important part of the school curriculum today, new research has revealed, with a further 65% agreeing that the subject has an impact on people's ability to understand each other in wider society.

The research, conducted by Savanta among 2,000 adults and commissioned by education charity Culham St Gabriel's Trust, also found that 71% of UK adults agree that the subject should reflect the diversity of backgrounds and beliefs in the UK today.

The new figures come as Joint Council for Qualifications data shows a 5.1% increase in Religious Studies A Level entries this year, whilst GCSE entries for the full course fell by 2.4% in England.

Seven out of ten people surveyed also agreed that RE's role is to provide pupils with the opportunity to learn more about other people, beliefs, worldviews and cultures (73%), to foster the mutual understanding of different beliefs among young people (71%), and encourage them to openly discuss their beliefs with others (69%).

A further two thirds agreed that the subject's role is to help young people critically evaluate their own beliefs (65%) as well as the beliefs of others (65%).

The key findings of the research include:

- Around two-thirds of UK adults say it's important to understand the beliefs of others in at least 4 contexts:
 - In everyday life (69%)
 - In relationships with friends and family (65%)
 - In school (65%)
 - In local communities (64%)
 - In the workplace (61%)
- Two-thirds (64%) of UK adults think that an understanding of their own beliefs is important to them, while over half (57%) agree that this understanding has a positive impact on their wellbeing

- Nearly two-thirds (64%) of the UK adult population think that it is important that RE is part of the school curriculum today
- Two-thirds (65%) of respondents agree that RE has an impact on people's ability to understand each other in wider society
- 71% stated that RE should reflect the diversity of backgrounds and beliefs in the UK today
- On the subject of religious education, respondents agreed that its role is:
 - To help young people gain a better understanding of their own beliefs (69%)
 - To foster the mutual understanding of different beliefs among young people (71%)
 - To provide young people with the opportunity to learn more about other people, beliefs, worldviews, and cultures (73%)
 - To encourage young people to openly discuss their beliefs with others (69%)
 - To help young people critically evaluate their own beliefs (65%)
 - To help young people critically evaluate the beliefs of others (65%)

Kathryn Wright, CEO of Culham St Gabriel's Trust, said: "Over the past fifty years, Britain's religious and cultural landscape has changed dramatically, with a decline in affiliation to some of the major religious traditions, an increase in others, and a rise in non-religious spiritual traditions. More than ever, everyone has a unique, personal view of the world, some religious, some non-religious, and often a complex combination of both."

"This research highlights the value of good religious education in equipping young people with the knowledge they need to interact with others who have different perspectives in our ever-changing society. It also plays a vital role in ensuring young people receive a balanced education and supporting a vibrant economy by preparing employees and future business leaders for the globalised workplace."

"A Level students clearly value the importance of extending their knowledge and understanding of religious and non-religious worldviews and continue to vote with their feet. The slip in GCSE entries, however, has suggested that too many schools are not able to fulfil their statutory requirement to teach RE to all their students, meaning some are missing out."

"This should serve as a call to action to Governors and Headteachers to make the teaching of RE a celebrated part of the curriculum. We urge the Government to recognise the subject's essential role and fund a National Plan for RE to ensure it is properly resourced and taught by professionally trained teachers, and to enact a statement of entitlement to a high-quality education in Religion and Worldviews for all pupils."

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Notes for editors:

Research background

The research was conducted by Savanta on behalf of Culham St Gabriel's Trust in June 2021. A nationally representative survey of 2000 UK adults was carried out to ascertain the views of the British public on how knowledge and understanding of religious or non-religious worldviews is beneficial to them in everyday life, in their social interactions, communities or workplaces and to understand whether the British public think that Religious Education should be taught in schools, what they think RE should include, and what role they think it plays in society.

Further details of the research and datasets are available on request.

British Social Attitudes Survey 2019

The British Social Attitudes survey, conducted by the National Centre for Social Research and published in 2019 found a shift in the religious profile of the nation towards non-affiliation, with 52% of the public now saying they do not regard themselves as belonging to any religion.

https://www.bsa.natcen.ac.uk/media/39293/1_bsa36_religion.pdf

Office for National Statistics – Religion in England and Wales 2011

ONS data provides a snapshot of religious affiliations throughout England and Wales in 2011. Despite falling numbers, Christianity remained the largest religion with 59.3% of the population identifying themselves as Christian. Muslims made up the second largest religious group with 4.8% of the population. Between 2001 and 2011 there has been a decrease in the proportion of people who identify as Christian and an increase in those reporting to have no religion.

[Religion in England and Wales 2011 - Office for National Statistics \(ons.gov.uk\)](https://www.ons.gov.uk/people-and-population/religious-beliefs/religion-in-england-and-wales-2011)

Culham St Gabriel's Trust

Cullham St Gabriel's is an endowed charitable foundation. The Trust is committed to providing teachers of religion and worldviews and other professionals with the support, connections, challenges and professional development they need. It wants all partners, such as parents, school governors, faith/belief communities and policy makers, to be positively aware of the benefits of a high-quality study of religion and worldviews. It also supports work that promotes the links between school ethos, values, leadership and school improvement.

[Culham St Gabriel's Trust](https://www.culham-stgabriel.org/)